Photo by Hans Gutknecht

anyon Country resident Rick Crow, a stock car racer at Saugus peedway, helps keep his mother's memory alive through racing. Crow's mother, Peggy, was an avid racing fan who died last December after a long bout with cancer.

In Loving Memory

Auto racing is tribute to mother for Crow

By TIM TREPANY
Signal sports editor

When Rick Crow rolled his stock car out on the Saugus Speedway track for the first race of the season, he looked up into the stands where his family usually sits and started crying.

That moment was just another painful reminder his mother, Peggy, had passed away.

"I looked up expecting Mom to be there and she wasn't," said Crow, whose mother sat one section over from the announcer, five rows from the top, during every race.

Looking for her reassuring smile like a boy waiting for milk and cookies has been a habit the 26-year-old Canyon Country resident has had trouble breaking.

Even though she died last December after a long bout with cancer, he often finds himself talking as if his mother were still alive.

"One time after she died I cut my foot and said, 'I have to call Mom and find out when I had my last tetanus shot,' " Crow recalls with a touch of sadness.

He had a special relationship with his mother, a much closer bond than his brother and sister.

He was the troublemaker in the family, but somehow — instinctively — his mother always seemed to understand her precocious son.

"Her and I were a lot alike," Crow said. "She was kind of a rowdy kid who came around and made something of herself and I was the kind of kid who wanted to do everything. I was the one my parents worried about."

Although he has trouble accepting his mother's death, Crow is comforted by knowing he'll someday see her again in heaven.

"I baptized her into the Mormon Church. Now that's really important to me because if you believe what the church believes about living eternally as a family, then everybody has to be baptized. For me to baptize her makes it easy for me now because I know someday I'll be with her in heaven, which makes it nice."

Crow converted to Mormonism 10 years ago after some missionaries rode up on bicycles while he and his brother, Greg, were playing basketball.

"They asked us if we wanted to hear about the gospel of Jesus Christ," Crow said. "They started talking to us and my brother grasped it first."

Greg was soon baptized into the Mormon faith, with Rick following suit. Within a year, their sister Connie and father Vern converted.

But Peggy held out.

She was a heavy smoker and feared

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she couldn't follow the religion's doctrine of abstinence of tobacco. But about five years after her sons' conversion, she had a change of heart.

"I kept bugging her and bugging her about it," Crow said. "She saw it was good for the family because, as far as the Mormon Church goes, you can't beat it for the family environment."

Although she was never active, she told Rick to stay close to the church in a deathbed conversation the night before she passed away.

For the last three months of her life, Peggy took prescription medication to ease the pain caused by the cancer. The painkillers affected her thinking. She rarely made sense.

Except for the final night of her life.

"The night before she died, she kicked everybody out of her room except me," Crow said. "She sat up in bed and talked with me for an hour straight, making total sense.

"She said, 'I'm going to die and I want you to know I'm proud of you and you turned out to be a great kid.' It gave me the opportunity to tell her she was a good mom.

"But she kept apologizing for dying. She kept saying, 'Tell your brother and sister I'm sorry because I wasn't

"I had fallen away from the church, but she told me, 'You should have stayed closer to the church and you should go back to the church.' "

Peggy also told Crow to keep racing.

Race cars and Saugus Speedway have always been a big part of the Crow family.

For as long as he can remember, his family's been going to the races at Saugus.

"I was born in '62, and I probably went to a race in '62," said Crow.

After the races, Crow would go into the pits and get autographs. The drivers were his heroes. He would give anything to be just like them.

Those memories are crystal clear to Crow, who's in his second full season of racing at Saugus. Now that Crow's on the other side of the autograph book, he's very careful to be a good role model for the children.

Crow has set steadfast rules for himself and his pit crew: there will be no swearing and no drinking.

"After a race, if a mom or dad wants to bring their 4-year-old down there, they won't have to hear a bunch of swearing or see people who they wouldn't want their kids to associate with.

"When I was a kid, I really respected the guys who drove out at Saugus. I ran around the pits and got their autographs. If someone they respect and think is cool stays away from drugs, then maybe they'll stay away

Peggy loved to watch her son race. She never missed a race when she was healthy and would even help her son work on the vehicle. When she was sick, Crow would tell her she had to get healthy so she could become a member of his pit crew.

"I kept telling her she's gotta get better because I have to have a jack man," he said. "I was trying to keep her pepped up and give her something to look forward to."

Crow, who has won two main events and is seventh in street stock points after moving up from hobby stocks, has helped keep his mother's memory fresh through racing.

He painted his stock car pink, his mother's favorite color, this season and won the pretty car award on opening night. And his crew is called 'Team Pooh,' because Peggy used to be called 'Peggy Pooh' by her husband.

"When my mom died I started backpedaling and thinking I wished I told her I loved her for the last 20 years," Crow said. "But I'm not going to make that mistake with my dad.

"When my dad dies I'm not going to backpedal. I'm going to know I told him everything that I should have and showed him the appreciation he deserves. When I had that talk with my mom, I told her how much I appreciated and loved her. Now, my dad already knows all that stuff."